

Striking Testimony by the Famous
Medical Authority, Dr. Treves,
of London, England



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STRIKING TESTIMONY BY THE FAMOUS MEDICAL AUTHORITY DR. TREVES, OF LONDON, ENG.

The millions of beer, wine, whiskey, and brandy drinkers here and in England have recently had a bomb thrown in their midst by the most famous English surgeon of the day. Sir Frederick Treves, who was created a baronet in recognition of his distinguished ability, recently declared in a public speech that alcohol was purely a poison, and should be treated just like any other poison, such as strychnine. His words of warning have been given prominence by the London press, and have created widespread interest. A prominent journal declares that his address on alcohol was "one of the most trenchant exposures that has ever been uttered by a distinguished medical man of the absolutely false claims made for alcohol."

Sir Frederick Treves is almost revered by the English people. As the King's physician, it was he who "saved the King's life" in 1902 by operating upon him for appendicitis.

Sir Frederick is still a comparatively young man, being in the early fifties.

He is said to retire nightly at 9.30, and to rise at 5 or 5.30 a.m. He is deeply interested in the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, having helped to build the first hospital ship, and has even acted for a few days as ship-surgeon, giving his services freely to the poor disabled fishermen.

Sir Frederick spoke as follows :

I do not propose to trouble you with any detailed accounts of the effects of excessive drinking, and the lamentable diseases that follow from it. The train of physical wreckage that lies in the wake of drunkenness is, unfortunately, a matter of only too common knowledge. I should like, rather, to occupy your time for ten minutes in dealing with the effects of alcohol on the body generally.

The point with regard to alcohol is simple enough. It is a poison, and it is a poison which, like other poisons, has certain uses, but the limitations in the use of alcohol should be as strict as the limitations in the use of any other kind of poison. Moreover, it is an insidious poison, in that it produces effects which have only one antidote—alcohol again. This

applies to another drug equally insidious, and that is morphia, or opium. Unfortunately, the term poison is by no means an exaggerated one, when it is realized that with alcohol, as drunk by many of the poorer classes, there is apt to be mixed a very definite poison in the form of fusel oil.

There is no disguising the fact that alcohol is of late years less used by the medical profession. It has a certain position as a medicine; that no one will dispute. But looking back over hospital records for the past twenty-five years, there is little question that the use of alcohol is diminishing.

In the first place, some people say, "Alcohol is a most excellent appetizer. There can be no possible harm in a little before a meal. It is, as the French say, an *appetitif* and helps digestion." What are the facts? First of all, no appetite needs to be artificially stimulated. There is no need, supposing this property of alcohol to be true, to use anything that will excite an appetite. So that on that ground I do not think there is much to be made out for its use. Dr. Rolleston, writing in Allbutt's "System of Medicine," says that alcohol "hinders artificial digestion."

Then it is said that it is strengthening, and that it gives great working power. We hear a great deal of this in the advocacy of British beef and beer. That sounds very well, but let us view the facts. Alcohol modifies certain constituents of the blood, and on this account, and on others, it affects prejudicially the nourishment of the body. It is said "to diminish the metabolism of the tissues," or to lessen the activity of those changes by which the body is built up. The output of carboic acid from the lungs is much lessened. The drinker invariably becomes ill-nourished. No man dreams of going into training and taking but a minimum of alcohol. Alcohol has undoubtedly a stimulating effect, and that is the unfortunate part of it. The effect, however, lasts only for a moment, and after it has passed away the capacity for work fails. It does this; it brings up the reserve forces of the body and throws them into action, with the result that when these are used up there is nothing to fall back upon. Its effect is precisely like a general throwing the bulk of his army into the fray, and then bringing up, so fast as he can, all his reserves, and throwing them in also. The immediate effect may be impressive, but the inevitable result is obvious. As a work producer alcohol is exceedingly extravagant, and, like other extravagant measures, it is apt to lead to a physical bankruptcy. It is well known that troops cannot march on alcohol. I was with the relief column that moved on to Ladysmith. It was an exceedingly trying time apart from the heat of the weather. In that column of some 30,000 men, the

first who dropped out were not the tall men, or the short men, or the big men, or the little men—but the drinkers, and they dropped out as clearly as if they had been labelled with a big letter on their backs.

With regard to the circulation, alcohol produces an increased heart-beat, a fuller pulse, and a redder skin. It calls upon the reserve power of the organ, but the moment the effect has passed off, the action of the heart is actually weakened. Consequently, the temporary effect is produced at an unfortunate cost. Then there is its action on the central nervous system. "Here," writes the authority already quoted, "it acts directly on the nerve cells as a functional poison." It first stimulates the nervous system and then depresses it, and, as with other poisons which act upon this part of the body, the higher centres are affected first. They become a little dull—a little less quick and acute. It may be very trifling, but there it is; so that the man who does his work on alcohol—even on a moderate amount, is not at his best.

Alcohol is certainly inconsistent with what might be called fine work. It is inconsistent with a surgeon's work, and with anything that requires a quick, accurate, and alert judgment. I am much struck with the fact that many professional men have discontinued the use of stimulants in the middle of the day. Why? For no other reason, probably, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, than that they find they can work better without it.

"Oh, it is an excellent protection against cold. If you are going into the cold air, you ought to take a little 'nip' of something. It does keep out the cold." This argument is used so often that even medical men would sometimes seem almost to believe it. I can answer this impression with a quotation from the authority above-named, that "alcohol tends to lower the temperature by increased loss of heat, and to some extent by lessened oxidation, while the power of the body to resist cold is much reduced by it." That answers this particular argument, which, as you know, is one of the most potent circumstances under which alcohol is used in England.

There is a great desire on the part of all young men to be "fit." A young man cannot be fit if he takes alcohol. By no possibility can he want it. No one who is young and healthy can want alcohol any more than he can want strychnine.

In conclusion, let me add one little testimony. Having spent the greater part of my life in operating, I can assure you that the person of all others that I dread to see enter the operating theatre is the drinker. I share with the late Sir James Paget his absolute dread of the secret drinker.